

blood, their sweat, and their sacrifice are the currency for our freedom.

Their sacrifice must never be exploited. I am honored to bring before this Chamber today legislation that ends the exploitation of veterans' finances and taxpayer dollars. A loophole exists in the GI Bill that allows some public flight schools to charge exorbitant amounts of money to veterans and taxpayers for veterans' tuition.

My legislation, the Fly Vets Act, not only stops this loophole dead in its tracks, but it empowers veterans and drastically expands their benefits. It allows them to pay for flight training through accelerated payments and allows them to double the monetary cap on both tuition and fees per year. This bill does not cut benefits in any way. It gives power back to our heroes in uniform.

I thank the many VSOs who support this legislation, along with Congresswoman UNDERWOOD for encompassing this legislation in her bill and working with me across party lines to ensure that the exploitation of veterans and taxpayers ends today.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MALINOWSKI). Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which the yeas and nays are ordered.

The House will resume proceedings on postponed questions at a later time.

VA ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD TRANSPARENCY ACT OF 2021

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4591) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress periodic reports on the costs of the Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization program, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4591

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021".

SEC. 2. REPORTS ON COSTS, PERFORMANCE METRICS, AND OUTCOMES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD MODERNIZATION PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 503 of the Veterans Benefits and Transition Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–407; 38 U.S.C. 5701 note prec.) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (e) as subsection (f);

(2) by inserting after subsection (d) the following new subsection (e):

“(e) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—

“(1) REPORTS ON COSTS OF EHRM PROGRAM.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of the VA Electronic Health

Record Transparency Act of 2021, and every 30 days after the last day of each fiscal quarter thereafter until the termination date specified in paragraph (3), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the costs of the Electronic Health Record Modernization program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Each such report shall include, for the period covered by the report and for the total period beginning on the date of the enactment of the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021 and ending on the date of the submittal of the report, a description of all actual expenses of, and driven by, such program, including any such expenses paid using—

“(A) any funds appropriated for the Department of Veterans Affairs, for any source or account, expended by any organizational element of the Department or by the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization Office for the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program;

“(B) any funds, from any source or account, expended by any organizational element of the Department for physical or technology infrastructure modifications, enhancements, improvements, or expansions at a facility of the Department necessitated by, or related or pertaining to, the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program; and

“(C) any funds, from any source or account, expended by any organizational element of the Department or by the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization Office for consultants, support contractors, or experts related or pertaining to the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program.

“(2) REPORTS ON PERFORMANCE METRICS AND OUTCOMES.—Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021, and every 30 days after the last day of each fiscal quarter thereafter until the termination date specified in paragraph (3), the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives a report on the performance metrics and outcomes of the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program. Each such report shall include, for the period covered by the report—

“(A) a list of the quality, performance, safety, or value metrics, key performance indicators, and other diagnostic or evaluation criteria in use to assess the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program and the electronic health record system, in general and at individual facilities, with respect to veterans, employees of the Department, and Departmental operations;

“(B) an explanation of any change to any of such metrics, indicators, and criteria compared to the metrics, indicators, and criteria included in any previous report submitted under this paragraph;

“(C) the data supporting or demonstrating each such metric, indicator, and criteria compared to the data supporting or demonstrating such metric, indicator, or criteria as included in the previous report submitted under this paragraph; and

“(D) a list of patient safety reports, incidents, alerts, or disclosures at each facility of the Department where the electronic health record system has been implemented.

“(3) TERMINATION DATE.—The requirement to submit a report under paragraph (1) shall terminate on the date that is 90 days after the date on which the Secretary submits to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and House of Representatives certification that the Electronic Health Record Modernization program has been fully implemented.”; and

(3) in subsection (f), as redesignated by paragraph (1), by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

“(3) The term ‘electronic health record system’ means the electronic health record system implemented pursuant to the Electronic Health Record Modernization Program.

“(4) The term ‘Federal Electronic Health Record Management Office’ means the office established under section 1635(b) of the Wounded Warrior Act (title XVI of Public Law 110–181; 10 U.S.C. 1071 note).

“(5) The term ‘facility of the Department’ includes a joint facility of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 4591, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4591, the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021, as amended.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has struggled to produce reliable cost estimates and reporting on the infrastructure needs associated with its \$16 billion electronic health record modernization project. This bill is a good governance measure which will enable Congress to conduct better oversight and hold VA accountable for its spending.

It is essential that we ensure that taxpayer funds meant to serve veterans are being used properly and that VA is maintaining detailed records of its IT and physical infrastructure expenditures. We owe that to the veterans who get their care from VA and to the American taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 4591, as amended, which was unanimously supported in committee.

I reserve the balance of my time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4591, as amended, the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act.

Since the very beginning of the Electronic Health Record Modernization, or the EHRM, program, this committee has been requesting accurate and up-to-date lifecycle cost estimates from VA. Despite our requests, VA has never provided a credible lifecycle cost estimate. VA's cost estimates could not withstand even the most basic scrutiny.

This bill would require quarterly reports on the costs of the EHRM program. It would also capture the roughly \$5 billion of costs the Inspector General found were unaccounted for and any other costs that VA has not been including.

Of course, cost is not everything. The electronic health record program needs to help the VA medical staff better care for veterans. That is why this bill would also require VA to report on performance and safety metrics. These data points will allow us to evaluate the program and determine whether it is making VA medical centers safer, faster, and better.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the bipartisan work of the Technology Modernization Subcommittee, and I am also pleased to be the original cosponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support H.R. 4591, as amended, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. MRVAN), who is my good friend and a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and chairman of the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization.

Mr. MRVAN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman TAKANO for yielding me time.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year the VA Office of the Inspector General released two separate reports highlighting VA's failure to conduct reliable lifecycle cost estimates for its Electronic Health Record Modernization program.

Specifically, the IG repeatedly found unreliable and incomplete estimates for infrastructure upgrades and costs as well as inadequate reporting of those costs.

Given the size and scope of the EHRM program, the lack of accurate cost estimates hampers VA's ability to provide Congress with an accurate picture of the cost and scale of efforts to modernize IT and physical infrastructure at VA medical centers.

This piece of legislation will address these issues. It requires VA to look at all costs across VHA, OIT, and any other programs for any amount expended on the EHRM program, including for infrastructure projects and contractors that were not part of the original contract. This legislation also requires VA to provide the committee with reports on performance metrics and outcomes.

I thank Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member BOST for their leadership and for cosponsoring this legislation as well as all of the other cosponsors and the committee members who have truly made this a bipartisan effort.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support this bill.

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Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4591, the VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4591, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress periodic reports on the costs, performance metrics, and outcomes of the Department of Veterans Affairs Electronic Health Record Modernization program."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VITAL ASSESSMENT ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5516) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit to Congress a report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5516

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "VITAL Assessment Act".

SEC. 2. VETERANS INTEGRATION TO ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The report shall include the following:

(1) The number of medical centers of the Department, institutions of higher learning, non-college degree programs, and student veterans supported by the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(2) The staff and resources allocated to the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(3) An assessment of the outcomes and effectiveness of the program in—

(A) supporting student veterans;

(B) connecting student veterans to needed services of the Department or services provided by non-Department entities;

(C) addressing the mental health needs of student veterans;

(D) lowering the suicide risk of student veterans; and

(E) helping student veterans achieve educational goals.

(4) An assessment of barriers to expanding the program and how the Secretary intends to address such barriers.

(5) An assessment of whether the program should be expanded outside of the Office of

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention to support students veterans with needs unrelated to mental health or suicide.

(b) UNIFORM BEST PRACTICES, GOALS, AND MEASURES.—The Secretary shall establish best practices, goals, and measures for the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department that are uniform among the medical centers of the Department.

(c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct outreach among the Armed Forces, veterans service organizations, institutions of higher learning, and non-college degree programs with respect to the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department.

(d) ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall assess the feasibility and advisability of including the suicide rate for student veterans in the National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the Department.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term "institution of higher learning" has the meaning given that term in section 3452 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) The term "student veteran" means the following:

(A) A veteran or member of the Armed Forces using educational assistance under any of the following provisions of law:

(i) Chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of title 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606 or 1607 of title 10, United States Code.

(ii) Section 116 of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-48; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note).

(iii) Section 8006 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117-2; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).

(B) A veteran who is enrolled in an institution of higher learning or other training program, without regard to whether the veteran is using educational assistance specified in subparagraph (A).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 5516, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 5516, the VITAL Assessment Act, as amended, which is sponsored by our newest House Veterans' Affairs Committee member, Congressman ELLZEY.

This bill requires that VA submit a report on the Department's Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership, or VITAL program. VITAL is designed to support student veterans in their academic settings, and it is a key component of VA's work to ensure that veterans thrive after completing their military service.

VITAL is a longtime program at VA, and this report will provide a timely